

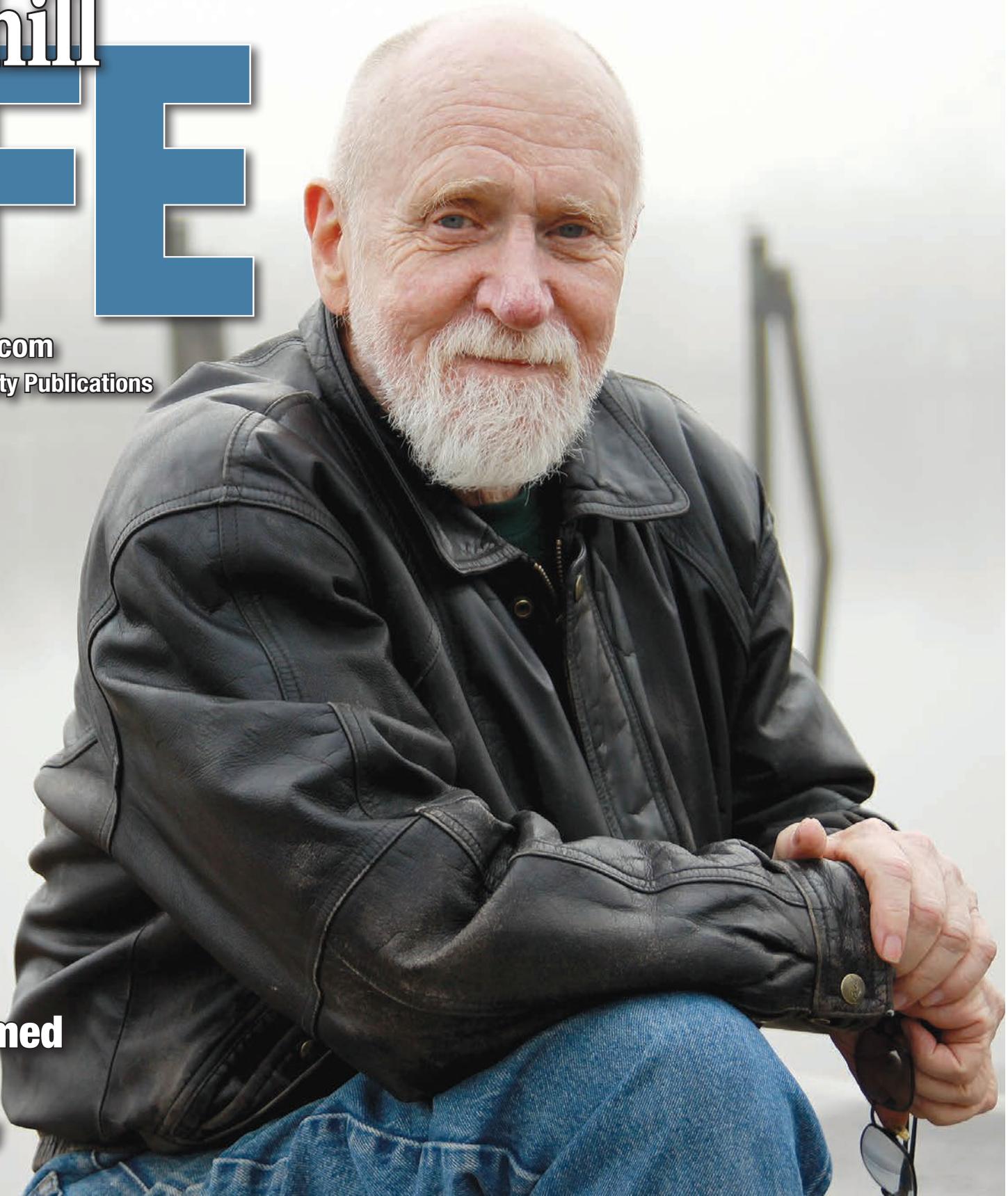
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Stories to tell

**Robert Herron named
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See story on page 26



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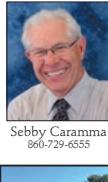
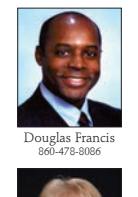
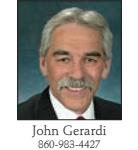
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QUOTE OF NOTE:

"She takes school very seriously. I'm so impressed with everything this child does."
- Lee-Ann Flynn

See story page 10

ON THE COVER

Bob Herron, pictured on a misty morning at Ferry Park, is Rocky Hill's newest Town Historian.

Photo by Lisa Brisson
See story page 26

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Photos courtesy of Marissa Violette and Liz Demaria

LIFE in the classroom

Griswold Middle school programs promote inclusiveness

by Allie Rivera
Staff Writer

There is one dominant idea that permeates the building at Griswold Middle School – everyone is welcome.

Acceptance and kindness are considered two of the school's strongest motivating forces, as can be seen throughout the halls as well as in two popular extracurricular activities, Unified Sports and GMS Social Club.

"It just shows how warm and welcoming our school is," special education teacher Marissa Violette said.

Both voluntary clubs provide students with special needs and their typical peers to interact outside of the classroom, forming friendships and strengthening skills.

The Unified Sports program at GMS is one of the oldest programs in the area. Physical education and health teacher Tyrell White started the club after learning about it in 1999.

"I went to a conference on it and it wasn't huge in Connecticut yet at the time," she said. "We were one of the first schools around here to do it and it really took off from there."

Unified Sports, a program

through the Special Olympics, is a nationwide initiative. Participating schools bring together teams that are evenly stocked between athletes with special needs and their partners to play sports throughout the school year.

"We do scrimmages, half-time basketball games, we travel to tournaments," music teacher and co-advisor for Unified Sports Liz Demaria said. "It's all after school and the kids are completely volunteer."

The Unified Sports program at GMS participates in basketball, soccer and volleyball. Since its inception, the program has grown in popularity, forcing White and Demaria to change the way they run the club.

"We used to just do it as first come, first served for the partners, but it's gotten so popular, we have so many kids who want to be partners, that we have to take applications," Demaria said.

The application asks students open-ended questions to determine why they want to be a partner. Through the three seasons, she and White attempt to give as many students as possible the opportunity to participate.

"We try to have them do one sport per season," White said.

Demaria said that, while

pleased, she is not surprised to see so many students applying to be partners.

"This eighth grade class especially is very involved and very invested," she said. "A lot of them came up doing it at the elementary school and knew they wanted to do it."

Both teachers said they have found the partners get even more out of the program than the students with special needs.

"They like being part of something that's not your typical sports team," White said. "The partners get that immediate satisfaction from it."

Both educators said participating in Unified Sports can help to teach the partners lessons on sharing, patience and understanding.

As a subset of the Special Olympics, the Unified Sports team members also work to raise money for that organization. This past year, the school was one of the highest fundraisers in its district, raising \$5,000.

As a fundraiser this year, many students in the program are participating in a Penguin Plunge, jumping into the frigid waters of Crystal Lake in Middletown on Feb. 25. While the school has participated in this event before, various teachers helped to up the ante by volunteering to make the

plunge themselves if students reach certain fund-raising goals.

"I already know I'm jumping," Demaria said with a laugh.

Both White and Demaria are sure the students will surpass last year's total. In addition to the Unified Sports program, the GMS Social Club has also grown since its inception four years ago.

"It's different because this is a club that's primary focus is friendship," co-advisor Marissa Violette said. "We are creating, promoting and fostering friendship."

Similar to Unified Sports, the GMS Social Club is split nearly evenly between students with special needs and their typical peers. While Unified Sports meets every other week after school, the Social Club takes place during school hours.

In this program, Violette and her co-advisor, school counselor Rosemary Lentini, pair students together to do activities, have lunch or walk in the halls.

"It's nice because it's not a huge time commitment from them," Lentini said. "Maybe they'll plan to have lunch together once a week or something. We're just trying to foster growing relationships."

The club has roughly 40 to 45 participants. The partners often approach Violette and Lentini to

participate, while others are specifically asked to join.

"Sometimes teachers will see students working well with others and suggest a pairing," Violette said. "It's open to anyone who's interested, but before we make matches, we talk to their teachers."

"We started with a few kids paired up and then we let it grow naturally," Lentini added.

While many times the students make arrangements on their own, the Social Club also offers some activities during lunch, such as making posters for a bulletin board.

"It's nice to just sit back and share a smile and socialize with each other," Violette said. "You can go into the cafeteria on any day and see kids sitting together. It's great."

Through both of these programs, the GMS community at large hopes to foster a greater understanding and level of inclusiveness that will continue into the future.

"I think our students with special needs help our partners more than our partners help our students with special needs," Violette said.

"It just shows that our school really is welcoming and inclusive."

RHL



Griswold Middle School students Max Cianci and Antonio Cristofaro took to the field during a Unified Sports soccer game.



Frank Guerrera and Chinnu Lakkakula worked together to make signs for the GMS Social Club.



Anie LaPuma, Emily White and Alesha Cruz looked determined as they walked onto the soccer field during a Unified Sports game.



Adorned in their bright tutus, Griswold students Zoe Scalise, Beverly Mastroianni, Hannah Fuller, Molly Lang, Amy Perna, Mia Valente, Marissa Kuhn, Mia Aglieco and Talia Carbone dove into icy water during last year's Penguin Plunge to raise money for the Special Olympics.

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Advocating for older residents

Town Council hires consultant to study space needs of senior center

by Mark Jahne
Editor

Older residents have been complaining for years that the space set aside for them at the community center for a senior center is insufficient to meet their needs. Action to rectify that problem may finally be coming in the months ahead.

The Town Council recently hired a consultant to conduct a survey of all senior citizens who live in town and recommend possible solutions to local government. Mayor Claudia Baio said the idea is to have someone with an objective viewpoint and topical expertise help the town solve this lingering challenge.

"We're very excited about that," she said. "We want to have a comprehensive study done."

The consultant is Manoj Pardasani, PhD., of Fordham University in New York City.

The mayor said she is open to any recommendation that may come out of the survey, be it

expanding use of the current facility or providing seniors with their own space in another building. They sometimes have to share the current senior center with other groups.

close to, the municipal campus bordered by Church and Old Main streets that includes town hall, police headquarters, a fire station, the post office and the public library.

"The fork in the road really is whether or not to expand the current senior center in town hall or build a new building."

— John Emmanuel

"We want a place the seniors can call their own. We have space right now, but it's not cohesive," Baio said. "I understand the impatience. They shouldn't have to wait anymore."

Her preference would be to keep them on, or

Whether that is a possible outcome is yet to be determined. The consultant is being paid \$10,000 and Baio said she considers that a small amount of money in return for the potential benefit the town will receive.

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"We want to make sure we're serving the expanding senior population," she said.

The mayor added that this group is expected to grow as the Baby Boom generation ages. That demographic already has a significant portion of its members in their 60s and early 70s.

"The hope is this will lay the foundation for us to create a plan to move forward ... with both programming and space," she said.

This study falls under the purview of a subcommittee made up of five people, three council members and two senior citizens. It is the first of a series of steps that will be taken to get as much input from older residents as possible.

Baio said that if the

Mayor Claudia Baio and Town Councilor John Emmanuel are part of a Town Council subcommittee that is studying the needs of senior citizens and the town's senior center.

decision is made to provide a separate facility as a senior center, the town would prefer to build rather than rent. That would require sending the matter to a referendum.

Some people have questioned why the town has not begun seeking grant money for this project but the mayor said funding agencies will not even consider an application until a formal plan is presented to them for review.

"The first thing we want to do is measure the current programs and services offered to the seniors," Town Councilor John Emmanuel said.

He is the chairman of the council's senior liaison subcommittee. Emmanuel pointed out that senior citizens have been asking for

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He expects that current programs will either expand or be reduced based upon the level of participation.

What he wants to learn most from the consultant is the specific amount of space needed for senior programming. He added that the survey will be sent to every known resident age 55 or older.

That will be followed in late March or early April with focus groups including members of the town staff and interested residents. He wants to hear not only from those who frequent the senior center, but also from those who no longer attend or do not even know such a facility exists.

"The fork in the road really is whether or not to expand the current senior center in town hall or build a new building," he said. "Would it be on campus or somewhere else in town?"

The Board of Education has told town government that it is willing to relocate the central schools office from its current space on the second floor of town hall. That would allow the town Parks & Recreation Department to move upstairs, thus freeing up space on the first floor just down the hall from the current senior center.

Emmanuel said that a year and a half ago the town considered knocking down the nearby town-owned Kennedy House and con-

structing a new senior center on that site, but there was not sufficient feedback from older residents to decide whether this was the best option.

Whatever the town decides to do, everyone needs to understand that it is a decision intended as a long-term solution.

"Once this is done, it's probably not going to be revisited for another 15 to 20 years, and we want to get it right," Emmanuel said. "Right now, we just want to gather data. The approach I'm trying to take is how the Board of Education does their projects."

Once the study is done, an architect will help the town determine the proper amount of space. Federal funds may be available, at least in part, to build a new senior center, something U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy spoke about during a tour of town hall this past year.

Toni Palazzolo of the Senior Task Force is also a member of the subcommittee. She said one of the challenges is parking, especially when town hall, the community center and the library all have simultaneous activities.

One of the needs she identified is to attract some of the younger seniors in town to begin utilizing the center. She contended that more of them might do so if it had such amenities as exercise equipment and a heated rehab pool.

"I envision this as a center for all," not just the older population, she added. "I envision more



Photo by Mark Jajne

U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy visited the Rocky Hill Senior Center this past year and said federal money might be available to expand the space or build a new facility. He is shown speaking with Mayor Claudia Baio, Senior Center Coordinator Cathy Sylvester and former town manager Guy Scaife.

of a park setting. I would like to see a small theater."

This could be used for performances, movies and lectures. Her other thoughts include walking trails and community gardens. Palazzolo said an earlier study was performed but she gave it no credence because it did not have senior input or involvement.

She enjoys intergenerational activities and hopes that, wherever the senior center ends up being located, there will be opportunities for younger people to interact with older folks. Her dream is a building

where community services, including social services, are housed in one place.

"We need to keep our people happy, active and healthy," she said after participating in the morning tai chi class.

The benefits of a senior center include helping older residents to maintain a sense of worth, remain active and fight the depression that can result from social isolation. The current senior center is heavily used and she said chairs are constantly being moved around to meet various program needs. **RHL**

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Keeping children safe

Police department holds clinic for proper installation of car seats

by Mark Jahne

Editor

There is a comfort in knowing that a parent has done everything he or she can to protect a child. That's particularly true when it comes to car safety seats.

State law requires that children up to the age of 7 and less than 60 pounds must be secured in a special seat when riding in the family car, van or truck. But these seats can be somewhat tricky to install and the Rocky Hill Police Department wants them properly affixed for the best possible protection.

That's why officers spent four hours on Saturday, Jan. 28, at Fire Station 2 on New Britain Avenue conducting a car seat clinic. They were joined by officers from Cromwell who are part of the Midstate Traffic Reconstruction Squad.

All of them are trained in the proper installation of car safety seats. They were joined by Safe Kids Connecticut, which is affiliated with the injury prevention program at Connecticut Children's

Medical Center.

"We have an inventory of car seats" to replace those that are expired or damaged, Lt. Rob Catania said. "One out of three is improperly installed."

Those who missed the clinic can have their seat installed or checked by appointment at police headquarters on Old Main Street. The department's supply of seats was donated by various sources including Safe Kids Connecticut, Farmington Bank, the state Department of Transportation and RHPD itself.

Catania said they try to hold this clinic at least twice a year. Officers take advantage of this interaction with the public to explain state law and best practices for passenger safety.

"Research shows that using a car seat saves lives and reduces the amount of kids in the emergency department," Director Luis Rivera of Safe Kids Connecticut said.

One of the people who came to the clinic was



Photo by Mark Jahne

Detective Pete Vanturas stands alongside a car where he just finished installing a child safety seat.

Paul Reale. His daughter attends a local day care center and he wanted to make sure that her seat was properly installed.

"I just think it's a great service," he said.

There was also a wide variety of literature available for parents to take home. **RHL**

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Student of the Month

Kaitlyn Pereau is praised as hard working and humble

by Allie Rivera
Staff Writer

When the announcement was made over the loudspeakers that Kaitlyn Pereau was the student of the month at Stevens School, the reaction was immediate.

"The whole class stood up and clapped. They were genuinely so proud of her," fourth grade teacher Lee-Ann Flynn said. "That's the type of kid she is."

For the 10-year-old, however, being a good person and working hard is a natural way of life, not a desire for recognition.

"She's humble and kind. She can always be counted on to do the exact right thing," Flynn said.

Kaitlyn's desire to do what's right is reflected in the work she does in the classroom. She and her fellow

fourth-graders recently completed a biography project for which they chose a well-known person to research. Kaitlyn chose baseball legend Jackie Robinson.

"He was the only African-American baseball player at the time and he changed things," she said.

This project was a new challenge for Kaitlyn, who had not completed this type of assignment before.

"The hardest part was writing it because you have to use examples according to the materials I found," she said.

Kindness and compassion are important to her outside of the classroom as well. She has participated in the school's Unified Sports program for the past four years.

"I started because my sister did it

and then my mom had to bring me along," she said. "I like helping people and talking to them and learning what they like."

That level of caring is seen at home as well.

"Her growing up with an older sister who has a variety of special needs, her kindness and ability to help us is amazing," her father Jason Pereau said. "Then she also is mentoring her little sister at the same time. Being that middle sister is tough, but she does a great job of balancing it."

In addition to participating with the Unified Sports team, Kaitlyn also stays active playing basketball and soccer. She has played basketball since second grade and now plays for a Parks and Recreation team that her father serves as the coach.

Soccer, however, is where her

"She takes school very seriously. I'm so impressed with everything this child does."

- Lee-Ann Flynn



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Photos by Allie Rivera

Ten-year-old Kaitlyn Pereau is a student athlete who works hard both in and out of school.

heart lies.

"I've been to her games and she's amazing," Flynn said.

Playing since the age of 4, Kaitlyn is on both the Rocky Hill travel team as well as the Connecticut Football Club's premier team, for which she had to try out.

"I usually play defense," she said. "I like kicking the ball and getting it high. That's what I'm good at."

When not dribbling down the court or racing across the field, she spends a great deal of time devoted to her studies.

"I give the opportunity for extra help in the morning and she chooses to come, even though she doesn't need it," Flynn said. "She takes school very seriously. I'm so impressed with everything this child does."

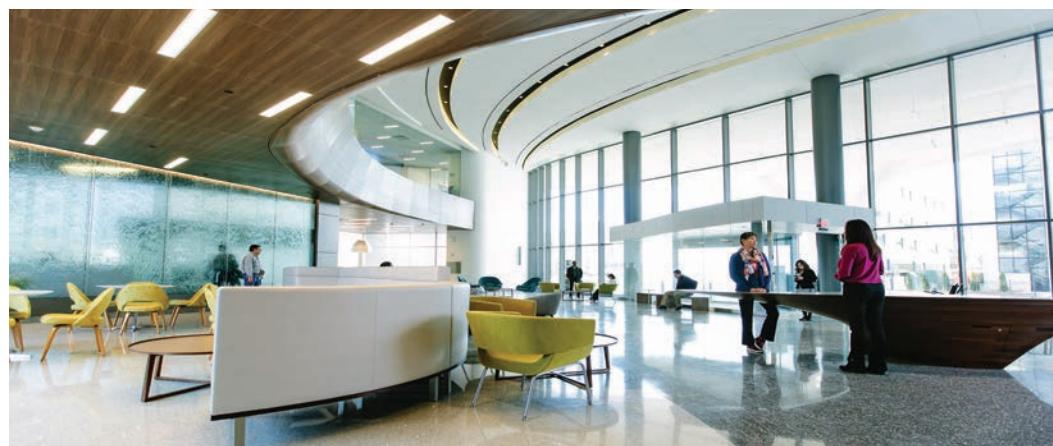
Kaitlyn works to bring that level of dedication to everything she tackles.

"She's got a tremendous work ethic, but she's humble about it," her father said. "She could score a soccer goal with a minute left and she'll just walk back to her position. There's no grandstanding or jumping up and down."

During her free time, Kaitlyn enjoys being with her two sisters, 15-year-old Emma and 3-year-old Addison, playing games such as life-sized Jenga or making various arts and crafts.

The family is close. Each year they travel to Disney World for a family vacation where Kaitlyn gets the chance to go on her favorite ride, the Haunted Mansion. Those that know her best call Kaitlyn a kind, humble and hard-working student.

"She's really an all-around, well-rounded, good kid and, most importantly, she's one of the kindest kids I've ever met," Flynn said. "She's the type of kid you dream about having in your class." **RHL**



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"We're talking hundreds of millions of dollars. We are losing so much money."

- State Rep. Antonio Guerrera



Has its time come?

Antonio Guerrera seeks support for electronic tolls on two major highways

by Mark Jahne
Editor

At a time when the state seems to be hemorrhaging money, state Rep. Antonio "Tony" Guerrera sees a mountain of money primed for the taking. He sees millions of dollars of cash driving on state highways every day.

Guerrera is the co-chairman of the state legislature's transportation committee. His district covers Rocky Hill and portions of Newington and Wethersfield.

He has long been an advocate of returning highway tolls to Connecticut. There used to be toll

booths on I-95, the Merritt Parkway, and several Hartford area bridges including Bissell, Charter Oak and Putnam, among other locations.

Those booths disappeared following a fiery crash at a toll plaza in Stratford in January 1983 when a truck driver allegedly fell asleep at the wheel and slammed into a line of traffic waiting to pay the toll.

Seven people died in an inferno that left blackened vehicles scattered all around the scene. Within a few years, all of the toll booths in the state were gone. So was all the money they produced.

Technology has changed over the past three decades and those states that collect tolls these days do it by electronic means rather than at concrete plazas along the road. It's much safer and less annoying to motorists and Guerrera is confident it's the way to go.

He started calling for electronic tolls five years ago and was a lone voice in the wilderness. Not anymore. He said legislators from both sides of the aisle are speaking with him about their increasing interest in his plan.

He admits to being a car buff

and said that is what originally got him thinking about this topic. The state has for many decades relied upon its gasoline tax – one of the highest in the nation – to provide the funds to maintain its bridges, highways and other transportation infrastructure.

According to the American Petroleum Institute, Connecticut charges 39.85 cents in combined taxes per gallon of gas. Add on the 18.40 cents per gallon of federal excise tax and it costs motorists more than 58 cents in taxes to purchase one gallon of gasoline.

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Modern cars are either all electric, hybrid or much more fuel efficient than even the recent past. That means drivers are buying less gasoline and the gas tax revenue is steadily dropping. Another means has to be found to provide needed transportation money.

"We can't support our roads and bridges through the gas tax," Guerrera said. "The feds haven't raised the federal gas tax since 1993."

He smiled as he recalled the early years of his electronic toll campaign.

"When I first started they looked at me like, what are you doing? The momentum is changing," he said.

Now, one by one, fellow legislators are coming to realize that the days of the gas tax being a prime source of state revenue are over.

He has already researched whether Connecticut would lose federal funding if it reinstated tolls and the answer is no. Several other northeastern and mid-Atlantic states already have electronic tolls. Massachusetts recently replaced its toll plazas along the Massachusetts Turnpike with such a system.

Those who regularly use the highways can buy a transponder and load money on it. Each time they pass under what is called a gantry holding a scanning device, the appropriate amount of money would be deducted from their account.

Those who do not want a transponder can simply drive the highways the way they always have. The scanners would capture the data from their car as it passes beneath them and a bill would be mailed.

This billing data would be linked to the state Department of Motor Vehicles and entered into a reciprocal agreement with DMVs in other states. Failure to pay would result in rejection the next time the vehicle is due for registration or the owner for license renewal, the same system that exists now for those who don't pay their property taxes.

He is confident that because the cost would be low, most people would readily pay.

"The best part of this is, if we can implement this, we can start to lower the gas tax," Guerrera said.

There is also a great deal of



File photo

Rep. Antonio Guerrera

money that could be generated from truckers and other through traffic.

"Thirty percent to 40 percent of people who travel on our interstates are from out of state," he added.

Connecticut residents would receive a discounted rate on the tolls in his proposal. He would also like people to be able to write off the cost of these tolls on their state income tax.

Guerrera proposes that the tolls be limited to two interstate highways: I-84 and I-95. At the recent State of the Town breakfast in Wethersfield, he called the amount of money that could be raised astronomical.

"That's huge. We're talking hundreds of millions of dollars. We are losing so much money," he said. "If we don't do it now ... we're already behind the 8-Ball."

State government sometimes draws money from its general fund to cover transportation needs. It would no longer have to do that if electronic tolls are installed.

Guerrera wants this money to go into a legally mandated lockbox so that it can only be used for transportation infrastructure and cannot be raided for other uses. He estimates that as much as 92 cents of every dollar collected would be profit.

"Our roads and our bridges are in bad shape. We need to be proactive," he said.

"The bottom line is a reduced gas tax, in-state discounts for Connecticut residents and millions of dollars to fix our infrastructure."

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Coming home

Logan Gauvin returns to town as a parks and recreation supervisor

by Mark Jahne
Editor

Logan Gauvin grew up in town and participated in some of the activities offered by Rocky Hill Parks & Recreation. Now he's back to lead those programs.

Gauvin, a Tolland resident who will soon turn 27, was recently hired to fill a vacancy for recreation supervisor. His predecessor, Chris Rusack, left to become recreation and youth services director in Cromwell.

"I kind of plan fun for a living."
- Logan Gauvin

Gauvin attended West Hill School, Griswold Middle School and Rocky Hill High School before heading off to college. He started at Central Connecticut State University and then switched to Southern Connecticut State University to earn a degree in recreation and leisure services with a concentration in community recreation and youth development.

"Three days before I graduated, I

was offered a full-time job in East Hartford," he said. "I oversaw six summer camp programs."

His job also covered that town's preschool and special needs recreation programs and the Special Olympics. His family still lives in Rocky Hill and his younger brother is a senior at RHHS.

Gauvin got married a year ago to a woman who teaches school in Ashford. Sports and recreation have always been among his interests.

"In high school, I was on the varsity ice hockey team for all four years, set a few records," he said.

He also enjoys playing golf. He was a seasonal employee and counselor with Parks & Recreation while he was growing up, so he has familiarity with its programs and operations. He worked for Rusack.

As recreation supervisor, his responsibilities include camps, special events, adult drop-in programs, youth cooking classes, theater classes, Summer Knights special needs programs, summer concert series, summer outdoor movies and an adult softball league shared with Wethersfield.

"I loved all these programs. The

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Photo by Mark Jahne

Logan Gauvin is the new recreation supervisor for the Rocky Hill Parks & Recreation Department.

work environment here is very unique. It's like a family," Gauvin said.

He added that many of his friends hate their jobs but do them for the paycheck. He loves his work.

"I kind of plan fun for a living," he said with a smile.

Gauvin is a volunteer with the Connecticut Parks and Recreation Association and oversees its camps committee. He enjoys being able to meet and learn from recreational professionals all over the state. He

also runs its Camp College, a training program for counselors and directors.

"I am very excited Logan has joined our Parks and Recreation family. He brings with him his vast experience and knowledge in special needs programming, camp experience and special event planning," Director Lisa Zerio said.

"Logan has the passion for this field and it is a joy to see his enthusiasm, creativity and dedication in the short time he has been here." RHL

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La Piastra opens on the Silas Deane

Gourmet to-go shop moves to town from Cromwell

by Mara Dresner
Staff Writer

Growing up, Lauren Siegel, found her way into the kitchen out of necessity.

"Both my parents worked. We were strongly encouraged to make our own meals," Siegel, who grew up in West Hartford, said. "I started with very simple things like pastas, mac and cheese, cheese steaks, that kind of thing."

Her mother enjoyed entertaining and Siegel would help at dinner par-

ties with everything from preparing food to clean up. When her parents divorced, she and her sister helped their father make holiday meals special.

While she had a career both on the air and behind the scenes in television and radio, she often found herself making homemade food gifts, such as loafs of ciabatta with dipping oils, stuffed breads and other delicacies. Family members encouraged her to take her hobby to the

next level.

"Lauren, you could probably make a lot of money doing it," she remembered them saying.

Siegel decided to take the plunge and apprenticed at a store in Avon, working part time with a shop owner who was looking to sell.

"It was a neat little shop," she said. "The idea was that I'd purchase the equipment and the client base."

While that deal fell through at the last minute, Siegel called it "all

part of the master plan. The only way to learn to do this, without a culinary degree, was to learn from someone else," she said.

She also took classes at various restaurants and at Lincoln Culinary Institute. Then she took her skills to ShopRite in Manchester, setting up a meals to go department.

"Part of the expense of going into the industry is having a commercial kitchen to cook out of. You're better off when you get started if the



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commercial kitchen already exists," she said.

In addition to creating meals to go, she offered cooking classes.

"I could get my feet wet and learn under their umbrella. I had to learn about proper food handling, proper food temperatures, the best way to make food in large quantities," she said.

After two years, she was ready to move into her own place. Her first space was in Cromwell, where she found a spot that was already outfitted as a commercial kitchen.

"They were looking to go to Simsbury and open a restaurant. I kind of cold called on them and just bought everything in place. Within a month, we were able to move stuff in. The timing was just right. It was a no brainer at the time," she said.

"I couldn't get a loan to save my life. I financed the business on three zero-percent credit cards. I paid every cent back before the interest hit."

After opening La Piastra in 2008, Siegel hired two chefs to do the cooking.

"I got myself out of the kitchen so I could work on my business

rather than in it," she said. "It's all prepared food to go. It's more like a manufacturing facility."

The menu features entrees, salads with house-made dressings, soups, pasta and sauces, breads, desserts and sides. Each comes labeled with ingredients and reheating instructions.

She's moving her business to

the Silas Deane Highway in Rocky Hill. The Cromwell location will stay open through the end of March.

The new location is much larger, 2,500 square feet versus 986 square feet. It will afford her the opportunity to offer meals in various sizes. Siegel also has her eye on opening satellite retail locations

where the cooking would be done in Rocky Hill, then sold at another site.

She's excited about the new store.

"I didn't want to be too far away from Cromwell because of my existing clientele. It was difficult to find a space that was suitable. The design was important to me. Parking was important to me. The ease of getting in and out was important to me," she said.

Customer favorites, such as chicken salad with made from scratch mayonnaise, chicken pot pie, shepherd's pie and stuffed peppers remain on the menu. Siegel updates the menu twice a year for fall/winter and spring/summer.

"It's gourmet to go. The reason we're able to keep our price points down is we make everything the same way at the same time," she said.

She also features a number of



Lauren Siegel has enjoyed cooking since she was a child. She recently opened La Piastra, a gourmet to-go and catering shop, on the Silas Deane Highway in Rocky Hill.

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"When we first opened, before it was really popular to do so, people didn't really know what gluten was nor how to pronounce it. We started labeling things as such because I was diagnosed with a severe wheat sensitivity," she said.

She's hoping to expand their catering business, both for corporate and social events.

Haddam resident Karen Packtor, who works as an assistant executive director for the Connecticut Association of Schools in Cheshire, has been a frequent customer of La Piastra for about three years.

"My husband will tell you that I am prone to hyperbole. However, I am not overstating or embellishing when I say that everything that Lauren puts on her shelves is absolutely delicious. It's hard to narrow down my favorites, especially since her menu options change each month," she said.

"What makes La Piastra truly

special is Lauren. Without exception, every time I have stepped through the door of the Cromwell location, I have been instantly greeted by a smile and a cheerful hello. On those rare occasions when Lauren is not on the premises, I always receive the same warm welcome from whichev-

ways to make her business grow and to better serve her customers."

Siegel said the name of the business sometimes causes confusion.

"At the time I was looking for something Italian. In retrospect, I wouldn't have chosen it. People have a difficult time pronouncing it. It

"This is a place of convenience where you can come get a prepared meal."

- Lauren Siegel

er amazing staff member is on duty," Packtor added.

"Lauren genuinely cares about her customers as people as well as patrons. She is friendly, caring, helpful, solicitous and ever so attentive to the needs of every person who stops in. And she is at all times industriously engaged in finding

means 'the plate' in some dialects or a large cooking stone, a granite or marble cooking stone that you cook fish on," she said.

"It also, in some dialects, means a large serving platter. The idea was a plate is all you need; we've got the meal. Then some smart alecks said, 'You need the fork, too.' Technically

I'm trying to say to people with La Piastra, the plate is all you need. This is a place of convenience where you can come get a prepared meal," she added.

Customers are able to order online or with the La Piastra app, which is available from the App Store or Google Play.

"It's the fresh quality food that you would make at home had you had the time and wherewithal. It's the way you would do it had you had the time," Siegel said.

"When I first started making food gift baskets for my family, they encouraged me to turn my passion into a career. Now I continue to be inspired by my extended family, our customer, striving to provide excellence in our product, service and a wholesome family experience." **RHL**

La Piastra is located at 1975 Silas Deane Highway. Call 860-757-3052 or visit lapiastra.com. The Cromwell location at 25 Shunpike Road will be open until the end of March. Call 860-632-PLATE(7528).

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News roundup



New officers join force



Officer promoted to sergeant

Nursing scholarships available

The Wethersfield-Rocky Hill Professional Nurses Association is seeking applicants for its 2017 nursing scholarships. These are available to qualified students pursuing an undergraduate degree in nursing and for registered nurses enrolled in BSN programs.

For more information, or an application packet, contact Judy Sartucci, Scholarship Committee chairman, at nursescholarships@cox.net.

[cox.net](http://www.cox.net). The application deadline is March 17.

New officers join force

Three new police officers were sworn in as members of the Rocky Hill Police Department and began their duties on Jan. 23. They are Ryan Hackett, Samuel Montes and Sean McCarthy.

The trio is now at the municipal police academy in Meriden for six months of intensive training in law enforcement tactics, operations and

standards. Upon completion of that training, they will be assigned the patrol division.

Welcome to town

The Kiddie Academy educational learning center held a ribbon-cutting ceremony the morning of Jan. 28. Mayor Claudia Baio cuts the ribbon with owners Doug and Natalie Doran, Director Krista Clark and Assistant Director Lisandra Gonzalez.

Sign up for adult education

Free high school completion programs are offered to Cromwell and Rocky Hill residents at 398 Main St. in Middletown. English as a second language classes are held in Rocky Hill and Middletown.

Come learn about the three ways you can earn a diploma. Day and evening classes are available, enrollment is ongoing and there is never a charge for these Board of Education programs. Call 860-343-6044.

Officer promoted to sergeant

Jeff Foss-Rugan was recently promoted to sergeant in the Rocky Hill Police Department. He is a member of the five-town Midstate Accident Reconstruction Squad and has special training related to enforcing the laws against those driving under the influence of alcohol.

Foss-Rugan, whose badge was pinned on him by his 92-year-old grandfather, is shown with Police Chief Michael Custer.

Couple arrested for harming child

On Feb. 4, the Rocky Hill Fire

Marshal's Office was made aware that a 2-year-old child had been brought to the Connecticut Children's Medical Center with burns on its body. The initial report indicated that the burns were the result of an electrical fire at 200 Cold Spring Road, part of the Century Hills Apartment complex.

Rocky Hill police and fire personnel responded to the apartment while detectives went to the hospital to gather evidence and information. During the course of an extensive investigation, it was learned that evidence and statements taken from the crime scene and hospital, and information gathered from witnesses, were inconsistent.

That led to further examination of the last adult to have contact with the child, an acquaintance of the child's mother. Michael Shamel Davis, 27, of Rocky Hill, was charged with risk of injury to a minor, second-degree reckless endangerment, interfering with police, tampering with evidence, third-degree arson and second-degree issuing a false statement.

Continued investigation resulted on Feb. 15 in the arrest of the child's mother, Shamique Martin, 26, of Rocky Hill. She is charged with falsely reporting an incident, making a false statement, risk of injury to a minor and cruelty to persons.

Police claim that she deliberately misled medical personnel and law enforcement, did not provide immediate medical treatment for the child and placed the child in additional danger. She is a licensed practical nurse and was aware of the severity of the child's injuries. **RHL**



Welcome to town

People notes

Stephanie Abodom, Rubeena Abraham, Nabihah Ahmed, Reva Apte, Sajma Cecunjanin, Numad Chedema, Michael Costello, Rachel D'Agostino, Mackenzie Freeman, Deivydas Giedrimas, Abhisek Gupta, Fahim Hasan, Nathan Hock, Derrick Holmes, Alex Janusko, Holly Knoechel, Alexandra Listwan, Kristjan Maandi, Daniel Madigan, Erica Masciadrelli, Amanda Masciadrelli, Alexandra Mastorakis, Erinn Maxwell, Emma Mulvey, Sabria Ortiz, Julia Petrini, Erica Petropoulos, Marisa Pietrandrea, Matthew Sabol, Paras Shah, Christopher Shank, Rachel Silvester, Emma Skultety, Steven Tomastik, Joseph Tomastik, Thaia Tzickas, Adam Vancisin, Daniel Varney, Mateusz Wilkowski and Shaharyar Zuberi were named to the dean's list at the University of Connecticut.

Sebastian Herrera, Daniel Kraynak, Alex Landry and Evan Silvester were named to the dean's list at Tunxis Community College.

Andi Duro, Neil Patel, Tej Patel, Brooke Dunnery, Brianna Hollister and Eric Collins earned high honors for the second marking period at the University High School of Science and Engineering.

Hilda Agyapong, Antonio Caralone, Rachel Casasanta, Leah Magnoli, Kelsey Ott and Eric Slowik were named to the dean's list at Eastern Connecticut State University.

Justin Barron, Skylar Barron, Sarah Cioffi, Shane Dawson, Robert Downes, Jordan Korn, Karishma Lawrence, Jack Marshall, Nicholas Miano, Alyssa Pilecki, Hannah Rowland, Jacob

Rowland, Matthew Safalow and Zachary Swilling were named to the first semester honor roll at Kingswood Oxford School.

Vincent Catania and Samantha Morann were named to the dean's list at Springfield College.

Christina Bobbitt, Evan Menze, Emily Siegel and Kraymer Bond were named to the dean's list at the University of Rhode Island.

Isabella Garzone, Nicholas Klatt and Kelly Clancy were named to the dean's list at Western New England University.

Humaira Bhura, Richard Cassarino, Mary Harrison, Thomas Koyles, Michael LaPorte, Kristen Lauria, Geetanjali Neemcharan, Erika Peterson, Taylor Rocco, Daniel Shumaker,

Madison Stabile and Adam Vassallo were named to the dean's list at the University of Hartford.

Alexander Bondi was named to the dean's list at Northeastern University.

James Bondi was named to the dean's list at George Washington University.

Louisa Acca was named to the dean's list at Emmanuel College.

Tea Kopic, Arianna Genovese and Victoria Spellman were named to the dean's list at Lasell College.

Erik Paulson was named to the dean's list at Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

Emily Pentland was named to the dean's list SUNY-Oneonta. **RHL**

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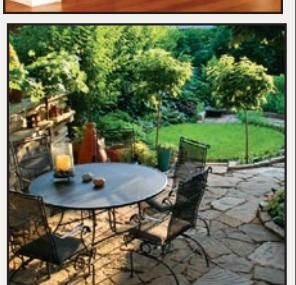
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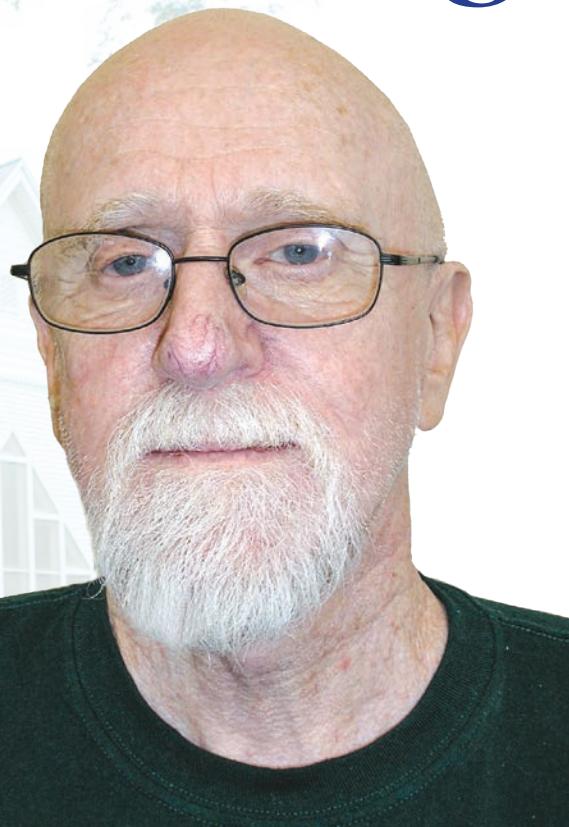
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Chronicling the past



Robert Herron takes on the role of official town historian

by **Mark Jahne**
Editor

Robert Herron loves history. He's also a big fan of accurate information and separating out legend from reality.

Those are just a few of the reasons why the Town Council recently appointed him to serve as its official town historian. Several people over the years have filled that role on an unofficial basis but this time the town wanted to define the job on paper and assign someone specifically to the task.

"Part of my job is to turn it into a useful arm of the town," Herron said.

He lived in such places as Boston and Ann Arbor, Mich., before moving to town in 2002. He is a retired data architect and systems engineer.

Herron is a member of the Rocky Hill Historical Society and this past year did a great deal of research into residents who served in the armed forces during World



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War I that is now becoming a book.

"I got involved with the historical society 18 months ago," he said. "I've always found it [history] interesting. There are myths I am trying to either validate or dispel."

Many of them are linked with folklore. One mistake he already discovered is that the image of the ship Minerva on the official town seal is in error.

The Minerva served during the American Revolution and is depicted on the seal as a three-masted barque. But in truth it was a brigantine and they only had two masts.

"I have always loved history. It's great stories. It's better than anything you see on TV," Herron said.

One of his goals is to document the town's more recent history, the past 25 years or so. One example of a historical event that occurred in this time period was the move of WFSB-TV 3 from downtown Hartford to Rocky Hill.

"Nobody records their own period ... but that's something I've got to do," he said.

The new historian pointed out that this is a town rich in history with three distinct historic districts in the Old Main Street, Elm Street and Ferry Park areas.

"I'd like to do a forum [online] where you throw out some ideas and get input from people," he said.

He would insist that this be done in a civil manner and participants would need to identify themselves and cite their sources. This all promises to be a major time commitment for the 75-year-old U.S. Air Force veteran, but he is excited about the possibilities and predicted that he will have fun.

"I enjoy doing this. I drive around town and I look at things with different eyes now," he said. "When you get at the truth, this is a

"I have always loved history. It's great stories. It's better than anything you see on TV."

- Robert Herron

charming little town with a great history."

The town historian reports directly to the town manager. Herron said he is working on a webpage that will include a brief history of the town including photos, a thumbnail biography of his credentials, and a definition of his role and responsibilities.

He's also looking into creating a Facebook page with topics such as fascinating Rocky Hill people, a forum called "Keeping it Real" that would post topics and solicit feedback, and "Today in Rocky Hill History."

He particularly enjoys it when high school students visit the historical society's Academy Hall Museum and show an interest in local history.

Herron is also expected to serve as a liaison between the Rocky Hill Historical Society and town government on history-related topics. His first major task is to start preparing for the town's 175th anniversary in 2018.

The town historian is expected to have a strong knowledge of town history as well as knowledge of various sources including people, collections, computer tools and computer resources.

However, that person is not an antiquarian, meaning that he will not assemble or maintain collections. Neither is he an archivist; rather, his job is to support, research and make use of archival resources.

"The position needs to be defined," he said.

His job description dictates that, while he is welcome to be a member of the historical society, he should not hold any office in that organization. This is done to make sure he performs his duties in a completely unbiased manner.

He explained that the historian's

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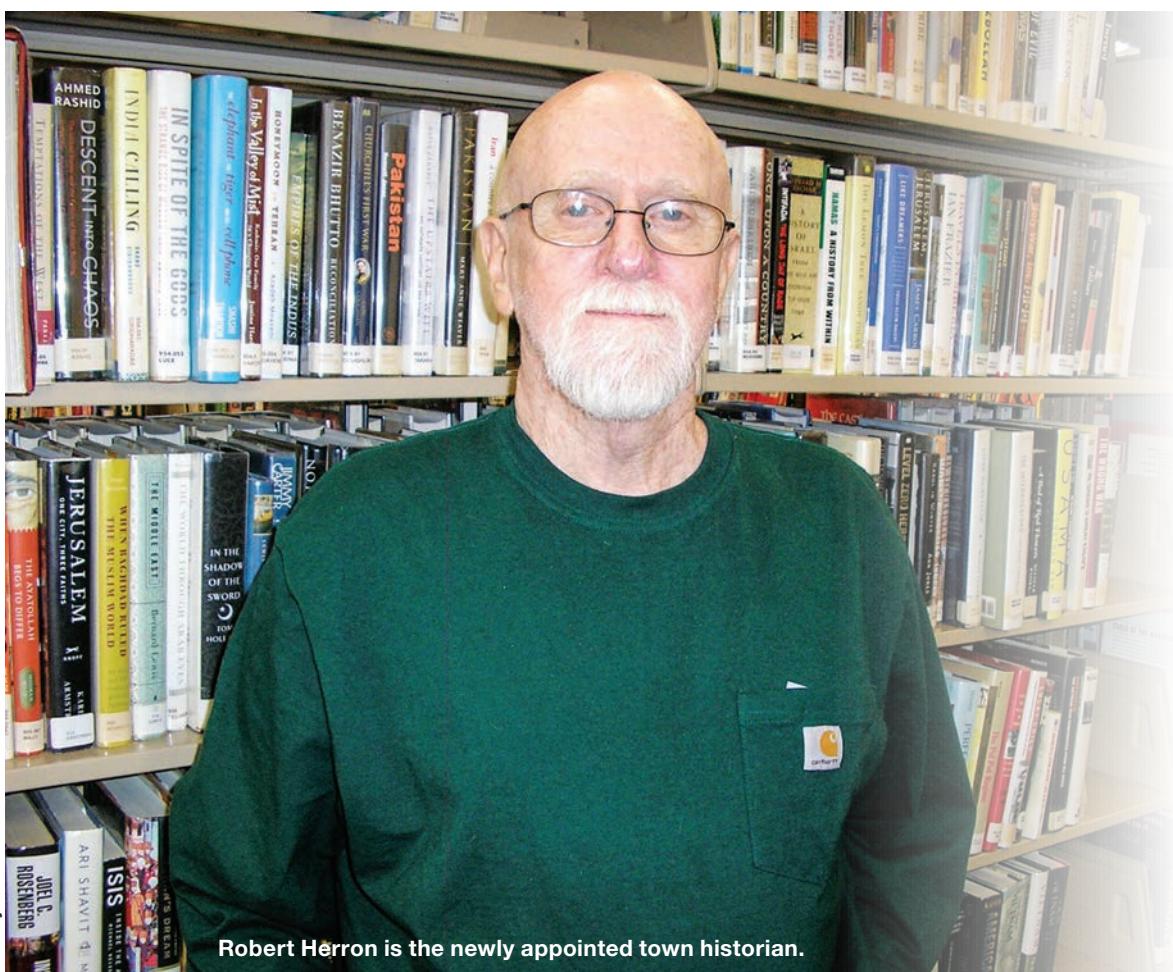
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job is to avoid tunnel vision and not worry about whether the outcome of his research is positive or negative. The most important thing is factual accuracy. He is also expected to keep himself apart from partisan politics and produce objective, unbiased history that is as factual as resources allow.

"The emphasis is now on me to do even-handed research for all parties. My job is to report historical facts as accurately as possible," Herron said.

Ed Chiucarello, president of the historical society, is pleased with the appointment.

"I asked Bob if he would be interested," Chiucarello said. "Rocky Hill is lucky to have him."

As members of the historical society, they worked together to create an inventory of the hundreds of artifacts the nonprofit has in its collection. He said Herron loves to organize information and converted many materials to digital format so that they could be posted on the society's website.

"He's just constantly into the books. He loves to research," Chiucarello said.

The pair also transcribed a collection of oral histories for RHH's website.

"We're doing an oral history once a month now," he said. **RHL**

Herron invites questions and comments from the public and can be reached at thistorian@rockyhillct.gov.

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LIFE of E's

Senior pets add spice

My husband and I moved to Cromwell in September 2014, bringing with us the last member of our cat family. We sent our boy, Luke, to the Rainbow Bridge that January and spent the next year without a pet in our household.

My first four cats were females, adopted in pairs from local shelters, first in New Jersey and then in Rhode Island. Luke belonged to a neighbor before he adopted us; he was about 7 at the time. Your brain can make all the logical arguments it wants about keeping retirement life simple, but when you've had at least one cat in your home for almost 40 years, your heart has a mind of its own.

About a year ago, I began to consider adoption, but I didn't want to start over with kittens that might be left without a home if they outlived me. I spent many hours on the Internet looking at cats whose aging owners had either died or been forced to give them up. More often than not, these felines are seniors themselves,

making them difficult to place. Visit a local shelter any Saturday morning and you'll see clusters of families fawning over the kittens. The cats that are "long in the tooth" are often ignored.

Since I wanted two cats again, I chose an organization that had several seniors awaiting placement. It's the Protectors of Animals in East Hartford.

In January of this year, POA opened an affordable spay/neuter clinic. Their goal is to dramatically reduce the number of unwanted litters in the Greater Hartford area. I support that effort not just for the obvious reasons. When you stem the flow of kittens upstream, more families will consider adopting older pets downstream. It's like trickle-down economics in the animal world.

We adopted 10-year-old Kallie through POA in March 2016. She's a calico and tortoise combination, quiet and gentle. Her former owner is now in a nursing home. In fairly short time, she began sleeping with me, much as Luke did in his last years. When I'm stretched out trying to work, she tries

to perch on my chest in front of my laptop. Kallie may be quiet, but she does not like to be ignored.

In April we added 7-year-old Stella—not quite a senior, but getting on in years. She's a torbie—a tiger and calico combination. Her original owner is likewise in a nursing home now. Stella is a talker and she's as energetic as Kallie is calm.

Stella has turned out to be quite a character. I was told to avoid giving her catnip because it gets her "over-stimulated."

It wasn't the catnip; it's just Stella.

During the day she naps a lot. She's tried just about every piece of furniture and I don't think there's any that she doesn't like if the sun is right.

Soon after we brought Stella home, we discovered that she enjoys "hunting" throughout the night. She goes to the end of the loft area where my bear collection is displayed in wooden crates. One by one she selects her prey and carries it in her mouth down the stairs from the loft. All the while, she emits her strange hunting meow. She deposits each animal, usually at the foot of the stairs. Then, she goes back up to stalk another one.

I've taken to sleeping with earplugs, since the hunting noises are surprisingly loud and seem to go on for hours. In the morning, I pick up the bodies and put them back in their display. It's not all bad: I get good exercise from the two or three trips that it takes to bring them back to the loft.

In an effort to preserve my own collection, I bought Stella several small stuffed animals—without catnip

in them.

She now has over a dozen critters. In addition to the predictable mice and rabbits, there's a cheetah, a duck, two sheep, a skunk, two bears of her own and a turquoise fish with spongy spines. I had hoped she'd leave my bears alone. Fat chance. One morning there were fourteen stuffies scattered about. Six of them were Stella's; the rest were mine. I've actually had to mend the limbs on several of her prey. You read this correctly. I'm spending my retirement stitching up the bodies that she dismembers.

Stella has taught her sister how to hunt. A reminder that Kallie was the quiet one—virtually silent. Now when I hear a hunting meow in the early evening, it's just as likely to be Kallie carrying around one of their animal print mice.

The two of them are so adorable, it's impossible to be upset with any of this. If my bears are still fair game, so what? The pleasure that these senior cats are bringing to their senior parents is worth every slobbered up stuffie that we step on barefoot in the morning. **RHL**

*Elaine M. Decker's books—*Retirement Sparks Redux, Retirement Sparks Again, Retirement Sparks and CANCER: A Coping Guide*—are on Amazon.com, including Kindle editions. One of her essays appears in the anthology: *70 Things To Do When You Turn 70*. Contact her at: emdecker@ix.netcom.com.*

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Slice of LIFE

photos by Lisa Brisson

There were plenty of pancakes for the crowd in the parish hall of St. Andrew the Apostle Church. The crowd was so large that Cub Scout Pack 135 Cubmaster Eric Christensen had to make a run to the store to purchase more pancake mix. Cubs were busy racing around taking everyone's orders while the church's Men's Group volunteered to staff the kitchen and dish out plate after plate of pancakes and sausages. Funds collected will go to cover the cost of pack activities and trips.



Plenty of pancakes

1. John Shebart of St. Andrew the Apostle Church Men's Group makes sure the pancakes are ready for the crowd attending the Cub Scout fundraiser. 2. Cub Scout Evan Scheuritzel, 9, repeats a customer's order to make sure he gets it right. 3. Best pals Madeline Cosker and Nina Ceruti, both 10, have a blast hanging out together at the event. 4. Glen Cote catches up with friends Elin and Tom Keating. 5. Cub Scout Pack 135 member Logan Hadden, 6, chows down. 6. Men's Group member Mike Milak serves up some sausages to Corey Christensen, 9, so that he can deliver them to a customer. 7. Cub Scout maternal volunteer Karen Christensen, seated, gets a hand with the pancake supper from fellow volunteers Elena Faits, Katrina Scelza, Colleen Cosker and Andrea Collura. 8. Tom McNamara and son Brodie, 9. 9. Cub Scout Pack 135 Cubmaster Eric Christensen, Assistant Cubmaster Tom Cosker and his son Noah, 8. 10. Plain, blueberry and chocolate chip pancakes were gobbled up by the attendees of the Cub Scout fund-raising supper. 11. Evan Scheuritzel, 9, gets a fresh order of pancakes to deliver from Dave Forrest. 12. Jacoby Cubeta, 8, enjoys his supper with Katie Sullivan.



11

12

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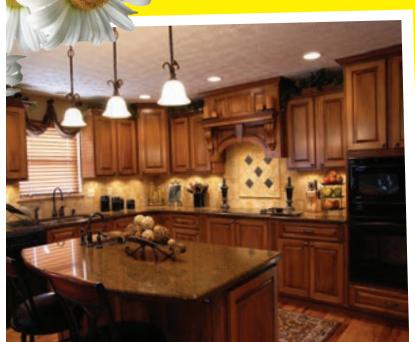
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LIFE MAGAZINE

March calendar

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

1 **Playgroup Plus**, 10:15 a.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info, also March 4, 8, 11, 15, 18, 22, 25 and 29

Adult Coloring, 6 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library, also March 8, 15, 22 and 29

Mystery Book Discussion, 6:30 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library.

Wethersfield-Rocky Hill Professional Nurses Association, 7 p.m., Pitkin Community Center, 30 Greenfield St., Wethersfield, 860-563-4150

2 **La Leche League**, 10 a.m. to noon, 23 Textbook Ave., 860-529-2307 or mgubala@sbcglobal.net

SCORE Small Business Workshop: Compete to Win – Content Marketing Strategy, 10 a.m., registration requested, Cora J. Belden Library

English as a Second Language, 10:30 a.m., Cora J. Belden Library, also March 9, 16, 23 and 30

3 **Art Start**, 10:30 a.m., for ages 2 and older, registration required, Cora J. Belden Library

6 **AARP Volunteer Tax Assistance**, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library, also March 9, 13, 20 and 27

SCORE Small Business Counseling, 12:30–4:30 p.m., registration required, Cora J. Belden Library

Be a Library Super User, 2–3 p.m. or 7–8 p.m., registration requested, Cora J. Belden Library

7 Knitting Group, 11 a.m., Cora J. Belden Library, also March 14, 21 and 28

Getting Started with Windows 10, 2 p.m., registration required, Cora J. Belden Library, also March 21

CT Hearing Voices Network support group, 7 p.m., Rocky Hill Congregational Church, 805-817 Old Main St., second floor classroom, 203-391-4968, also March 14, 21 and 28

8 Cora Creates St. Patrick's Day Craft, 3 p.m., for ages 7 and older with an adult, registration required, Cora J. Belden Library

Alzheimer's or Dementia Caregivers Support Group, 5 p.m., The Atrium at Rocky Hill, 1160 Elm St., registration required, 860-563-5588 or kpernerewski@benchmarkquality.com

Kids Get Cooking – Taco Cups, 6:15 p.m., for grades K-2, registration required, Cora J. Belden Library

9 Youth Art Month Reception, 6 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library

10 Toddler Drive-In, 10 a.m., Cora J. Belden Library

11 Alzheimer's or Dementia Caregivers Support Group, 10 a.m., registration required, The Atrium at Rocky Hill, 1160 Elm St., 860-563-5588 or kpernerewski@benchmarkquality.com

Preserving Your Family History, 2 p.m., registration requested, Cora J. Belden Library

14 Career One-on-One, 10 a.m., Cora J. Belden Library, also March 28

Getting Started with iPad, 2 p.m., registration required, Cora J. Belden Library, also March 28

Health and Wellness with Dr. Klughers — Healthy Heart, 6:30 p.m., registration requested, Cora J. Belden Library

17 LEGO Free Play, 10:30 a.m., for ages 2 and older with an adult, Cora J. Belden Library

18 World War I Scanning and Digitizing Day, 10 a.m., registration requested, Cora J. Belden Library

21 Author Talk with F. Mark Granato, 6:30 p.m., registration requested, Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

22 Monthly Makerspace, 5:30 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library

Is your club, community organization, school or house of worship holding an event open to the general public? If so, please send us the details for inclusion in our calendar. Email your events to Mark Jahne at mjahne@turleyct.com or mail them to Turley CT Community Publications, 540 Hopmeadow St., Simsbury, CT 06070.

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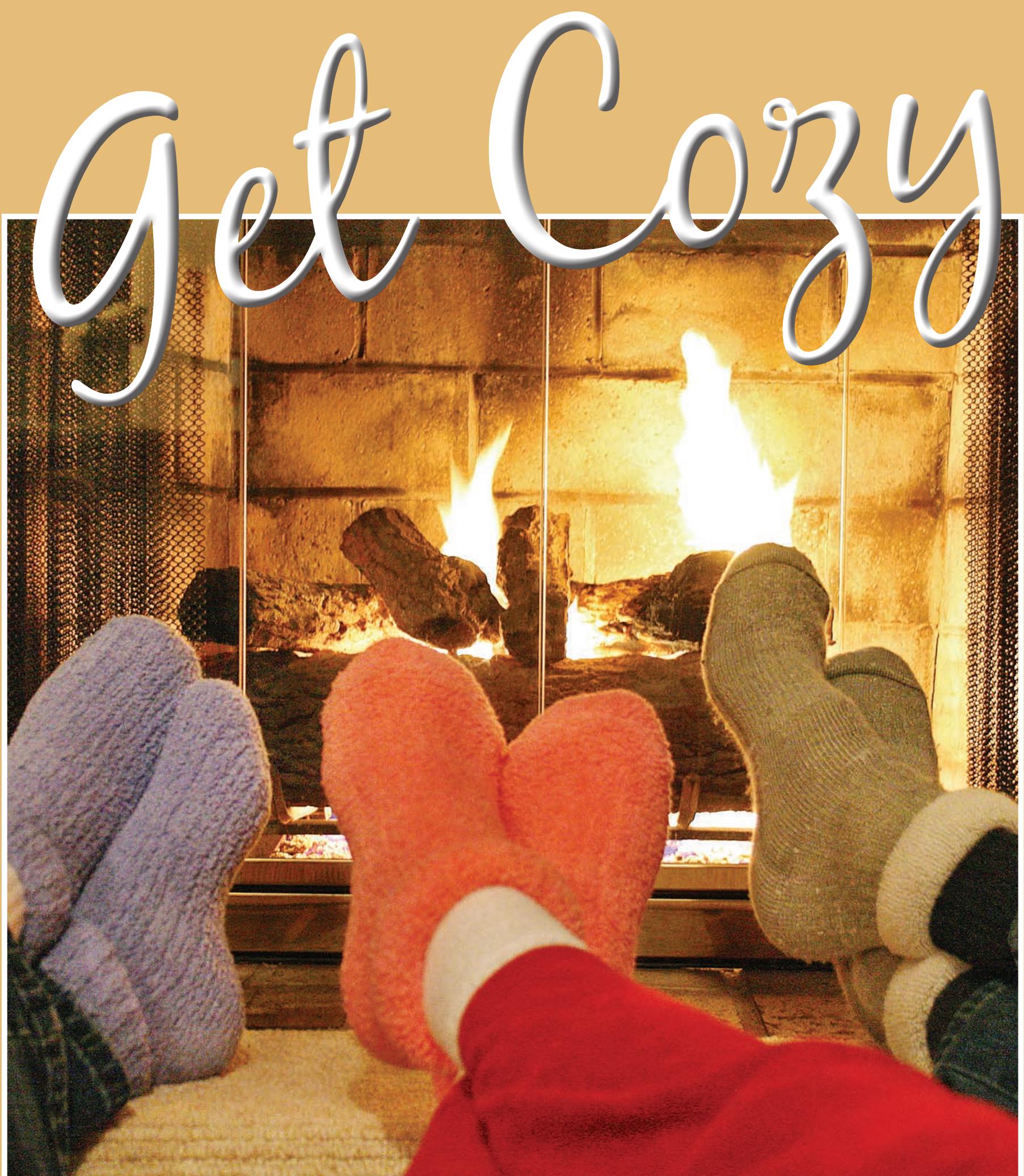
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Get Cozy

A cozy home

Design tips that bring comfort on chilly days

by Mara Dresner
Staff Writer

Chuckles, Connecticut's answer to Punxsutawney Phil, may be predicting an early spring, but that doesn't mean there aren't still plenty of chilly days and even colder nights ahead. Since home is not only where the heart is, but also where most of us hunker down when the calendar turns from merry and bright to dreary and dank, we asked design experts for their best tips, big and small, to make your favorite rooms cozier.

Use the walls

Liz Goldberg of Goldberg Design LLC in Glastonbury said that comfort is all around you.

"One thing that I think makes a family or living room cozier is upholstered walls. I've used them in many areas. It not only looks amazing with all of the beautiful fabrics available, but, functionally, it helps with noise reverberation and you know how cozy a room feels when you can sit and have a nice conversation or hear the music playing softly," she said. "When you're in a room and you can sit next to someone and have a nice quiet conversation, that makes it feel more intimate, and cozy to me is intimate."

Goldberg said there are numerous techniques and fabrics to choose, including cotton, vinyl and leather looks. In addition to changing the feel of a room, it can serve a practical purpose as well.

"It's a great method if you bought an older home or a condo and there's

old-fashioned paneling. You put this over the wall and it hides a multitude of sins," she said.

It is a job that's best left to the professionals.

"You have to know what you're doing or it can get messy looking," Goldberg noted.

She said that some clients pick one wall to feature, while others decide to use fabric on all their walls.

"It's a similar feeling as when there's a bare window and then you put a drape on the window. It softens the effect and gives you an opportunity to introduce color and texture in the room on another surface you might not have thought of. It can really transform a space," she said.

Accent with a personal touch

Heather Grahling, owner of Vivid Hue Home, a gift and home decor boutique in Farmington, believes that adding accents that are meaningful to you will help make any room feel warm and welcoming.

"A side table

suddenly becomes more alluring with a special vase filled with blooms. Place treasures found during family travels on top of a coffee table and add layers with stacks of personal interest books. These personal accessories not only provide a cozy touch, they will add layers to your room that will ultimately result in a homier feel."



Get Cozy

Grahling said.

She puts this into practice in her own home.

"One of my favorite coffee table accents is a brass lobster that I found while thrifting on vacation in Kennebunkport. I bought the lobster for a steal and set it on top of design books on my coffee table. It reminds me of my summer at the beach and also adds a nice conversation piece when guests ask about it," she said.

She also uses photos to add a special feel.

"In today's age of social media, most of my family photos are on my phone or Facebook. A few years ago, I started selecting my favorite digital photos and creating a printed flip book. There are many inexpensive apps that make this task very easy," she noted. "Now, in addition to my favorite interior design books, I also stack my family photo books onto the coffee table. It's personal and meaningful and makes my home feel more lived in."

She also uses art in a similar way.

"I love art of any kind. I have a small collection of pieces from gallery artists that I started curating a few years ago. But my ultimate favorite thing to do is to take my

children's artwork and frame it and display it proudly on our walls. I display their artwork right alongside the gallery pieces," she said. "I love this eclectic mix and, even more importantly, each piece means something to me."

Appeal to all the senses

Julie Levine of West Hartford and Glastonbury's Kim Lamagna, partners in Luxury Living for Less, believes in appealing to multiple senses.

"Color, texture, sound and even taste can add to a room's coziness and ambiance," Levine explained.

She said you might want to create a reading nook within another room in your home, such as a den.

"Start with just a small corner of the room. If you're lucky to have a fireplace, you're halfway there. If not, group together some wonderful candles to cast that warm glow," she said. "Start with a soft wool rug of earthy tones, add one or two comfy chairs with a chenille fabric. Add a soft fuzzy or faux fur throw and pillow, and an ottoman to put your feet up. Place a small table nearby

with great books. Add a table or floor lamp that you can dim. Pour yourself a warm beverage to soothe your soul, and you've got an instant cozy space to relax and enjoy."

Comfort a child

It's not just grown-ups who crave a cozy environment. Michele Cottone Kriticos of MCK Interiors, LLC in Wethersfield, said that a faux fireplace can add a comforting dimension to a child's room.

"There are new ones on the market that are so real both in appearance and functionality. They give the ambiance of crackling wood and the warmth of their embers," she noted. "So many children ask to keep the night light on at bedtime. Placing a faux fireplace in their room will not only give them a soft glow of light, but a rhythmic soothing sound of crackling wood to fall asleep to. It also defuses noise from other areas of the house."

During the day, it may even spark your child's imagination, providing relaxing play options.

"By day they can set up a fireside tea party," she suggested. **RHL**

"Start with a soft wool rug of earthy tones, add one or two comfy chairs with a chenille fabric. Add a soft fuzzy or faux fur throw and pillow, and an ottoman to put your feet up. Place a small table nearby with great books. Add a table or floor lamp that you can dim. Pour yourself a warm beverage to soothe your soul, and you've got an instant cozy space to relax and enjoy."

-Julie Levine

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Get Cozy

Netflix and *knit*

Chunky sweaters are chic this season along with other cozy crafts

by Sloan Brewster
Staff Writer

Knitting a chunky sweater is a great way to while away the hours in the winter and it's also very fashionable.

According to Marion Carling, owner of Village Wool in Glastonbury, super bulky yarn, which is knit using giant needles, is in this year.

It's great "if you're a millennial and want to look chic," she said.

"You can make a chunky sweater in a couple hours in front of Netflix."

Carling has knit a scarf out of bulky yarn, but during the blizzard on Thursday, Feb. 9, she was organizing her craft room and getting ready to make hats using thinner yarn.

Knitting hats is just one of the many crafts that are perfect ways to keep warm and cozy when it's cold and snowy. The finished product is also useful for the season.

Taking on a hat is about a five-hour project, though most people tend to knit for an hour or so at a

time, Carling said.

"It is a quick project. Sweaters and shawls take longer," Carling said. "Uses up a small amount of yarn."

Carling also crochets, which she said, is quicker than knitting.

"If you want something really, really warm, crocheting is good for that," she said.

Crocheting is done using double stitches, which makes the end result thicker and warmer, making it great for blankets and throws, though, it's not exclusively for the thick and warm creations.

"The opposite can be true, too," Carling said. "You can make things

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Get Cozy

very racy, open for summer."

Another perk to knitting and crocheting is that they are portable, meaning you can take them with you, have them on hand to pass the time in a variety of places and situations from a game to a mechanic's shop.

Ann Wincze, of Blumen Laden in Canton takes knitting to a different level. After she makes mittens and hats, she felts them.

She intentionally makes them oversized, then puts them in the washing machine in hot water to felt them.

"When you agitate the wool it shrinks," Wincze said. "The wool becomes really, really dense. It's much warmer than a knitted mitten."

Making felted mittens is a craft that is well-known to fishermen's wives, Wincze said. In addition, to being warmer, because they are so dense and thick, they are also waterproof.

Wincze also knits scarves, but she doesn't felt them because it's not necessary, she said.

She makes wreaths, too, but that's a craft for other times of the year, she said.

"The wreaths you do in the spring or the summer and the fall and Christmas," she said.

Marilyn Gattinella, co-owner of Close to Home in Glastonbury, likes to quilt. This winter she has been giving a class on making appliqué blocks.

Appliqué is a French term for

applying shapes to a background, such as a square piece of fabric, Gattinella said. It could be a cutout of a home or pet, or in the case of the quilts she and her students have been making in class, flowers.

"The sections of the quilt are squares with flowers on them," she said.

Gattinella quilts on a sewing machine, which makes it easy to socialize while doing her craft because the sewing machine can be set up in the family room or by the fireplace, she said.

"Conceivably, you could be sitting at your sewing machine and visiting with your family," Gattinella said.

She was planning to catch up on stitching during the snowstorm.

"I can't wait to be sitting down at my sewing machine and do my stitching," she said.

Quilting is more than a way to pass a few hours, it's about making something from the imagination.

"First of all, it's an example of creating. There are so many different avenues that a quilter could travel down that there's something for everybody, an extension of your personality, a way to share with others," Gattinella said. "Quilters are very famous for sharing."

Quilting can be used for making things such as pillows, table runners and purses.

It's also great to do in the winter.

"The whole winter thing is that we're indoors in our industry, we're not

competing with the garden or the boat or the beach home," Gattinella said.

It's also a great thing to do when all the hard work is finished.

"Your family obligations are taken care of and now the me time comes," Gattinella said.

In March, Close to Home will host a sew-a-thon skirt making day for the Whole in the Wall Gang Camp. The skirts will be made out of pieces of T-shirts.

The proceeds will go to the camp.

Not all crafts are for doing at home. At The Claypen, West Hartford, you can paint your own pottery

The inventory changes seasonally, with incense holders and wax warmers and such on the shelves in winter, said Manager Stephanie Yearsley. What's more, it's a great place to thaw out after being out in the cold.

"Our kiln always keeps it warm in here," Yearsley said. "It's always cozy in here."

Painting pottery can be for the family and children, or for a girls night out. There is something on the shelves for everyone and feel free to bring a snack or a bottle of wine to enjoy.

"We have a ton of choices of pottery to choose from: useful to fun, funny stuff," Yearsley said. "You can make yourself a set of dishes or mugs."

Staff is on hand to assist and to offer suggestions or inspiration, or to help with the technical aspects, such as tracing designs, making geometric shapes or painting over lace, Yearsley said.

"It makes a cool design. We have a bucket of lace," she said. "People are always pleased with what they create. We have a saying our kilns are magical."

Staff will also help set things up for children, and there is a special child-friendly palette that has colors that don't turn brown when mixed together.

"We all know that kids will blend it all up," Yearsley said.

Yearsley enjoys when children come back to get their fired masterpiece, she said.

The Claypen also offers glass fusing. The craft involves cutting glass into shapes and having it fired in the kiln. It can be made into anything from a dish to a business card holder.

Sandy Clifford of Scene Art Bar in Unionville recommends a night of sip & paint.

The bar offers instructor-led painting projects with step-by-step instructions so that even beginners leave with a completed painting.

There's also pick-your-own-painting night, a new offering that gives customers the chance to choose any painting from the bar's library, she said.

The artist is still there to help, but the project is more self-directed.

For an at-home project, Scene Art also offers a DIY paint by numbers kit. There is also beading and making jewelry, scrapbooking, painting on canvas and many other creative ventures. **RHL**

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Get Cozy

Snuggle up

'Tis the season for warm beverages and tasty treats

by Alicia B. Smith
Associate Editor

It's snowing, it's raining and you do not have be anywhere. It is the perfect time to grab your favorite blanket, settle into your favorite chair with your book and just enjoy the afternoon. The only thing missing is a warm cup of something and a tasty bite to nibble on.

For some that might mean a cup of tea with a sweet treat, some cookies or a piece of cake, perhaps?



When it comes to tea, there are more options available than one might think that range from the savory to the sweet.

At Culenteavo in Farmington, owner Viviana Pinhasi is passionate about

tea and often holds tea pairings that share what to serve with tea.

"Tea with food may be a similar concept that you do when you pair wine with food," she said. Like wine, a food can complement the tea and

enhance certain aspects of the tea or food.

White tea, for example, has a delicate flavor and is best served with something light or served on its own. Fruit is a good option; apples can

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Get Cozy

balance the flavor, while something like berries intensify the flavor of the tea.

White tea is not processed; rather the leaves are harvested and left to dry. Preparing white tea is simple. Loose leaf tea is put in an infuser; it is best to use 175-degree water and allow the tea to steep for 3 minutes.

Green tea, Pinhasi said, has a stronger, more vegetablelike flavor and tends to be on the salty side. Green tea, she said, goes well with Chinese or Japanese food, or fish dishes. She recommended not having it with Indian food, which is too spicy and would not match well with the spinachlike qualities of the green tea.

White chocolate with matcha, a Chinese spice, goes well with green tea, too.

Because of the green tea's unique flavor, Pinhasi suggests only steeping it for one minute.

An oolong tea is something between a green and black tea and tends to have more caffeine than the green variety.

"It will remind you of a tradition-

al black tea, slightly spicy, more robust," Pinhasi said.

A good pairing with oolong is cheese. A good brie, which is a creamy cheese, will help to bring out the sweetness of the oolong. Parmesan is also a good choice, as that will bring out the spiciness of the tea.

Oolong, Pinhasi said, is best steeped with 185-degree water and steeped for two minutes.

Finally, there is the black tea. This variety is fairly common and usually comes from India. It tends to have a strong flavor and can be made with boiling water and steeped for as long as five minutes.

For those who have a sweet tooth, black tea is a great option to enjoy with scones or shortbread.

Pinhasi likes to enjoy a plain scone with some hibiscus-infused butter.

She also offers an interesting option at her tea shop: honey infused with smoked tea.

All teas come from the same

plant, the variations from white to black and everything in between is created through the different ways of processing the leaves. Leaves are simply dried for white tea, leaves are harvested then dehydrated to make green tea. To make oolong tea, the leaves are allowed to start to oxidize before being exposed to heat that stops this process. With black tea, the oxidation process continues for a longer period of time.

For those who think that tea is a stuffy drink, the kind where a pinky is held out while taking dainty sips, Pinhasi said it is fine to slurp tea. Doing so, she said, allows air to be drawn in with each sip and helps to enhance the flavor of the tea.

There is also a way to get around the temperature differences for having the best cup of tea. That is to try an electric teakettle that enables the user to select a temperature, thus assuring the perfect cup of tea.

When it comes to coffee, there are staunch supporters of simply drinking the java straight up and not bothering

with a bite.

That is how Marie Engel, co-owner and manager of J. Renee Coffee Roasters in West Harford, enjoys her coffee.

"When I come in in the morning I have my "Marie-acano." It's an Americano, they put a little spin on it. That's it for me," she said.

There are others, Engel noted, that prefer to eat something with their coffee.

There are those who prefer to have something savory. The shop offers a Greek spanakopita, spinach and feta wrapped in phyllo dough.

"It's something to go with plain coffee," Engel said.

"People who like milk-based drinks like something sweet," she said, adding that these folks gravitate toward scones.

"It's a matter of taste," Engel said.

"What really sells, because our coffees are espresso-based, is biscotti," Engel continued. "They like to dip it in their coffee. It's very traditional. It's the Italian way." **RHL**



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Get Cozy

Warm up

There's still time to get cozy by the fire

by Lynn Woike
LIFE Staff

Warm and cozy go together, and it's hard to be warm when heat is going up the chimney.

"The heat in your home is escaping up that chimney, even with a fire going," said Sherry Kozikowski, co-owner of Valley Fireplace and Stove in Canton. "The damper has to be open for the smoke to exit, but heat can exit, too. Generally, people leave the damper open all the time, so more heat escapes up the chimney."

For that reason, she suggests a glass door enclosure over the front of the fireplace that can remain open while enjoying a fire, and then closed for all other times.

Kozikowski also recommends installing a supplemental heating system such as a wood, pellet or gas stove that will not only stop the heat from escaping, it will become a supplemental heating system. From the time a choice is made to completed installation is one to two weeks.

"Gas is the cheapest," she said, which could be one of the reasons it's also the most popular.

"It's so easy," she said. "No hauling wood or pellets ... [and] it can come on automatically."

Avon Plumbing & Heating, located in Avon, has been installing a wide variety of gas log fireplace sets in new and existing homes and condominiums.

"It eliminates the hassle of burning wood and burns considerably cleaner," according to Stacy Moore, project manager and designer. "With the click of a button, you transform your fireplace into a beautiful, warm, glowing fire anywhere in your home. The gas fireplace sets can be installed with either propane or natural gas."

The project takes only a day, providing the chimney is clean and a gas line has already been installed.

Projects can take up to three weeks if additional renovations are desired, such as resurfacing or encasing the fireplace or adding a cabinet to hold a flat screen television above it.

"You can be creative," Moore said, because even if you do not have a fireplace in your home, you can add a gas firebox created from a metal hearth with a wood surround.

A fireplace will be the focus of whatever room it's in. Originally, their mantels were installed to catch smoke, but have since become more of a decorative piece.

"If you want to cozy it up," Hayley Bryden, a designer at Ehrlich Interiors in Farmington, recom-

mended "replacing the basic shelf of a mantel with a large piece of reclaimed wood. To give more visual interest to this concept, try incorporating some ornate brackets underneath the reclaimed wood."

Building a surround to encase it is another decorating option.

"Bookcases are super cozy," she said. "They can be used to display much more than books and can be filled with family photos in decorative frames."

To accessorize, Bryden likes to place a large mirror over the fireplace. "It could be an antique if that's your style," she said.

Lighting, such as sconces on either side of the fireplace, can also add warmth, complementing the fire below.

To accessorize a wooden mantel, she said add iron, such as a large sculptured piece, along with a few smaller items.

But none of that is even necessary.

Just making a fire makes for a cozier atmosphere, said Kurt Wabrek, who with his wife, owns New England Patio and Hearth with stores in Canton and Wethersfield. Only three things are essential: dry wood, a poker and a spark guard. Grates, tool sets and screens come in a variety of styles, so that choosing them "is a matter of personal taste as well as function."

While it's common sense, he said it bears repeating that safety is key. The flue should be open before a fire is lit and ashes must be disposed of safely. **RHL**

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Editorial

What to do about Hartford's fiscal woes?

Hartford Mayor Luke Bronin has toured several central Connecticut suburbs seeking any support he can find for his financially ailing city. It's been a hard sell, but he knew that would be the case from the outset.

The city is facing a \$50 million budget shortfall that is projected to increase to \$70 million or more next year. There are several reasons for this.

Prior mayors and City Councils practiced reckless and irresponsible spending. They borrowed too much. They entered into questionable projects, the prime example being the Dunkin' Donuts minor league baseball stadium.

They negotiated contracts that, in some instances, paid outrageously high pensions to retired city employees. It should be noted that this is no longer the case.

When debt came due, they renegotiated that fiscal responsibility in a dangerous manner and did what the politicians in Washington, D.C., do all the time – kicked the can down the road. The problem now is the road has reached an end and the can cannot be kicked any further.

The primary source of the problem is Connecticut's heavy reliance on the property tax to fund municipal budgets, more than any other state. This system works much better in a rural or suburban environment than it does in an urban community.

More than half of the land in Hartford is tax-exempt: state buildings, hospitals, colleges and more. The city is supposed to recoup a por-

tion of that tax value through a program called PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) but state government has not fully funded that for years.

It's a recipe for disaster and that's exactly what is staring Bronin and other city leaders in the face.

He does have options, but they range from bad to terrible. He has taken admirable steps to stem the tide of red ink, but the numbers show that simply raising taxes or cutting spending to the bone will not solve the problem.

The city's tax rate is already 74 mills. That heavy burden has driven out many small and even medium-sized businesses. Why should they stay in Hartford when they can relocate to a suburb where the mill rate is in the 30s or low 40s?

Bankruptcy is one of his options, but that would have harmful ripple effects on all of the other cities and towns in central Connecticut. Businesses will either leave or decline to locate here. Jobs will be lost. Homes will face foreclosure.

The best possible solutions are an increase in PILOT money, a share of the state's sales tax – not just for Hartford, but for all 169 cities and towns – or a change in the property tax dependency.

But in a year when state government is trying to solve a more than \$1 billion deficit of its own, that's a tall order. The next few months will reveal how much the state can, or is willing, to help Hartford and its other major cities. **RHL**



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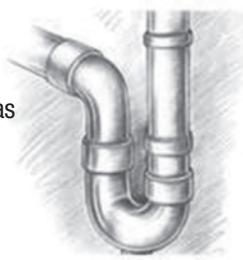
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BY MARK DIXON
WFSB METEOROLOGIST [AMS]



In like a lion, out like a lamb?

The month of March is one that can be beautiful, but also quite volatile here in Connecticut.

When it comes to temperature – on the first day of the month 24 degrees is the average low, 42 is the average high. By the end of the month, the average low

goes up to 33 while the high warms to 54. Not a bad, as we transition from winter to spring, officially on the 20th (at 6:29 a.m.) with the Vernal Equinox. When it comes to the extremes of the month, the coldest temperature was achieved in 1967 and 2003 when the low was -6 (on the 19th and 7th, respectively).

Also since records have been kept, for the Greater Hartford Area, 89 degrees is the warmest it has been – on the 31st in 1998.

When it comes to snow, March is historically a month featuring some of the more notable storms. Take for instance the Blizzard of 1888, over 50 inches of snow fell in Middletown.

Then more recently, there was the Storm of the Century (Storm Josh), on the 13th in 1993. An event that brought over a foot of snow, a lot of sleet, and a strong wind. So by no means are we immune to the bigger ones, but the average (based on a 30 year timespan) is just 6.4 inches. **RHL**

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